



New England School Development Council

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VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:
EFFICIENCY IN DATA COLLECTION, REPORTING,
AND COMMUNICATIONS

(Act 82, Section 14)

April 17, 2008

**New England School Development Council
28 Lord Road
Marlborough, MA 01752**

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Vermont Department of Education:

Efficiency in Data Collection, Reporting, and Communications

Executive Summary

One of the biggest complaints about the Vermont Department of Education is the volume of reports required of supervisory districts and local schools each year. Although Vermont state laws require many reports, the federal government greatly increased data requirements as a result of No Child Left Behind. A team from the New England School Development Council surveyed 268 local educators and interviewed thirty school and business leaders to seek ways to improve the Vermont Department of Education's efficiency in data collection, reporting, and communications.

The major concerns are about the many hours consumed, the timetable of reports, redundant information required, and the multiple formats for Education, Health, Office of Civil Rights and others. The Vermont Department of Education has responded by putting forty reports in an electronic format, supporting an electronic Vermont Data Consortium, and posting an annual calendar of report due dates, and by communicating with Supervisory Districts and schools each week via email.

The Senate and Governor should approve House 879 which would eliminate a dozen reports. The state should finance additional state office capacity to put most of the remaining reports in an electronic format. All Supervisory Districts and schools should join the Vermont Data Consortium. A state education data council should make recommendations for further consolidation and elimination of reports each year. Legislators should set reporting sunset dates and eliminate one report for each one added.

The US Congress should reduce the reporting requirements and consider testing grades 3-8 every other year rather than every year. This report predicts a trend towards multi-year or longitudinal "value added" educational reporting, rather than the traditional compliance reports or snapshots as of certain dates each year. Vermont educators prefer information that could improve instruction, rather than spending hundred of hours documenting their integrity.

I. Introduction

The Vermont legislature specified in Act 82, Section 14, of the Acts of 2007 that the state contract for an independent review of operational effectiveness and efficiency of the Department of Education. The Act provided for an Evaluation Committee convened and chaired by the Commissioner of Education to seek and evaluate proposals from contractors. The legislation specified six education associations and one representative from the business community to guide the selection of an independent reviewer. Given limited resources, the committee focused on reports and information flow, state and local.

The Committee met in January 2008 and selected the New England School Development Council to conduct the review. The NESDEC team included Joseph Cronin who led two state education systems as the Massachusetts Secretary of Educational Affairs and Illinois State Superintendent of Education, and Arthur Bettencourt who has served as a local superintendent in two Massachusetts school systems. Donald Kennedy, another former superintendent, helped conduct focus groups with key local education leaders.

The review explored ways to increase operational efficiency, and streamline communications within the department and within the education system. The specific challenge was “identification of ways to eliminate redundancies, inefficiencies, outdated work methods, and cumbersome reporting systems; to address capacity issues; and to streamline current practices and processes.”

The final product was a report for members of the Vermont House and Senate Education Committees as well as for the Vermont Department of Education staff and the participating associations.

II. Methodology

NESDEC as the contractor carried out these specific data gathering steps:

1. A review of the Vermont DOE staffing, budget, technology and communication capacities from 2003-2008. Another contractor was assigned to study communications within and between state agencies.
2. An electronic survey asking specific questions about the burdens created by required reports from local schools and supervisory districts, and about which reports generated useful data and which might be considered for elimination. Responses from 268 school principals, superintendents and other staff members were received by March 21, 2008
3. NESDEC held focus groups or phone interviews with thirty representatives of six Vermont organizations: Superintendents, School Board Association, Principals, Council of Special Education Administrators, Vermont's NEA teachers, and with Vermont Business Roundtable representatives. NESDEC team members also met with internal staff of the DOE, with six state legislators to discuss existing mandates, data collection options, and streamlining strategies.
4. NESDEC then used the above information to prepare a report of findings and recommendations for "improving the operations and efficiency of the department and its work with the field." NESDEC agreed to conduct a briefing for key legislators and state education staff.

III. Major Findings

Vermont Senators asked a fundamental question, “Is the Vermont DOE a service organization or an enforcement agency?” State and federal laws require the Vermont Department of Education to provide technical assistance, workshops and help to local schools and supervisory districts. But the Congress and the Vermont legislature, especially in recent decades, mandate the collection of more than ninety reports, many of them extensive and time-consuming. All too often, local educators now believe that the Vermont Department of Education-imposed burdens that were actually required by elected state and federal officials in statutes.

Vermont has always required annual reports on educational finances, the number of pupils enrolled and the number of educators assigned to teach and administer the schools. These are used not to improve instruction but to verify the requests for state financial assistance to support the public schools. Vermont also needs certain information about budgets to calculate the tax rates and allocate state aid. Passage of federal laws added heavily to the reporting burdens, especially to comply with the Education of Special Needs Children (IDEA), Vocational Education (Perkins) Act, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB requires reports on Highly Qualified Teachers and an annual assessment of student achievement in eight grades, two through eight and grade 11 (NECAP). The federal Office of Civil Rights requires other reports on acts of discrimination and other “critical incidents”.

Vermont legislators also require reports on school choice, to document compliance with laws governing students tuitioned from one district to another, and for other reimbursement purposes

Vermont now collects data via 98 reports, potentially two reports each week year round. To be fair, some reports apply only to schools offering vocational-technical programs or to individuals pursuing a GED or a teacher license. Some of the reports such as Special Education, federal Title programs, or state census statistics are bundled together. Respondents felt the number of major reports was generally about two a month. In certain supervisory districts the number of reports is multiplied by the number of separate school units, as many as 8 or 12. By comparison, a Massachusetts school board spokesman recently cited the burden of 106 state reports each year, eight more than Vermont but equally heavy. The Vermont report burden is not unique.

A handful of Vermont respondents acknowledge the legitimate needs of federal and state officials to hold them accountable. More than a dozen acknowledged the substantial efforts of the Vermont DOE in recent years to move many reports from manual written documents to electronic formats, and to send weekly emails of useful instructions and advice and answers to frequently asked questions.

However, half of the 268 Vermont respondents complain that some questions are asked more than once, and that much data are historical and no longer useful for planning. Many object to reports required during December-January budget or the October NECAP

testing seasons. Respondents indicate that few of the report findings are summarized in a way that could help schools adjust the curriculum or improve policies or practices. One observer compared the lack of feedback to the end of the first Indiana Jones film where the Ark is packed in a box in a vast warehouse where it might never be found; an unlikely analogy, but a cause for reflection on the fate and subsequent use of information collected by the state.

Some feel that the cumulative burden of reports is punitive, and detracts from a focus on teaching and learning. One respondent described the total reporting workload.

“These (reports) require a great deal of time by personnel: special education, HQT (highly qualified teachers), and Medicaid documentation. It’s not any one report in particular; it’s the number of them coupled with various surveys that we are required to produce – such as our yearly budget plan, school report and action plan, etc. Then there is the yearlong calendar of test administrations and the reports to the community regarding these as well as the numerous direct reports to parents of various kinds – newsletters and other notifications. I do most of them myself (but) I know there are some reports that nursing staff completes. I also have special education reporting obligations.”

Another described the life of a local educator:

“There is a constant stream of paperwork required to do anything in a public school. If I want to initiate a new program, I have to write a grant which requires more reports. There is the Tech Plan due every two years or so and that is necessary if I want to qualify for the E-rate grants that I need to get us more (computer) band-width so I can do my state reports online! Qualifying for that requires that I fill out Free Milk (and lunch) reports to prove I have a high enough poverty level. And then there are the constant audits to prepare for and the monthly budgetary paperwork checks and balances. Plus supervision and evaluation documentation and now...producing my own IPDP (Individual Professional Development Plan) so I can get my license renewed! There is an endless stream of required documentation and reporting. Educators are well known as a highly responsible law abiding group of professionals – yet we are constantly asked to prove and re-prove that we are.”

Local educators are upset by the growing information and reporting burdens placed on them by federal and state lawmakers.

One question is whether, when a new report is required, the legislature should simultaneously eliminate at least one existing report, just as Congress would only fund a new program if they could find savings from another. Another question is whether the state or some other data consortium might collect the data and generate all the reports required by federal agencies. That process in Vermont has actually begun, possibly at the half way mark, and with state and federal appropriations.

IV. Vermont Department of Education Staffing and Budget

The Vermont Department of Education in 2008 employed 205 persons, compared to 194 persons in 2003, an increase of approximately 6%. The tasks of helping districts comply with state and federal laws increased by much greater than 10%.

However, of the 205 Vermont Department of Education employees, 20 individuals work on data collection for approximately half the required state and federal reports, an increase from 12 staff in 2003 and 18 in 2004. The information technology staff was expanded to meet the greater data requirements of No Child Left Behind, taking effect in 2002. Other program managers in special educational and technical education are also accountable for the Vermont database on specific IDEA and Perkins (technical education) programs and expenditures. Three of the staff members support the DOE computer systems and file servers.

The Vermont DOE data processing information technology staff budget has increased from \$642, 653 in 2003 to \$1,358,418 in 2008. The operating expenses grew from \$80,000 in 2003 to \$230,635 in 2007, essentially flat the last three years.

The federal National Council on Educational Statistics contributed \$ 160,000 towards supporting data management and reporting, including preparation of a Best Practices Guide for local data staff and a grant to assist the Vermont Educational Data Warehouse.

Three New England states collaborated on the development of a New England student assessment program known as NECAP that administers tests and reports data to the federal government, to Vermont and to local schools. Vermont's expenditure for annual testing was in 2003 approximately \$1.7 million for tests in three grades in basic skills, then \$ 1.6 million for tests in seven grades in 2007, genuine savings realized from collaboration with two other states. Maine took a different direction, using the SAT exam, but had to pay for additional test items and measures that in the end cost another \$700,000.

V. Diagnosis

The data collection burden is heavy, and became more burdensome over the last decade. The situation is not going to improve without aggressive Congressional and state action. The burden will grow heavier the next two years for at least two reasons:

1. The US Department of Education expects that states submit 100% of their reports each year. Very few states collected all those reports. Vermont is in 95% compliance, but will be required to collect another fifteen reports to reach full-compliance.
2. The federal special education act (IDEA) calls for additional data collections on the school and student level in 2009 and beyond, many requested by advocacy and parent groups.

These two reporting requirements are totally beyond what the Vermont state agency and legislature can control. They are required by acts of Congress and leave little or no discretion to the Vermont DOE.

Moreover, there are growing tendencies for both federal and state legislators to specify educational solutions in great detail. For example, everyone wants “safe and healthy” schools free of epidemics, HIV, drugs, alcohol, guns and violence. There are both federal and state laws asking for reports on cases of fights, bullying, harassment, expulsions, in school suspensions, time-outs and other punishments, all to be reported to the state, US Department of Education and the federal Office of Civil Rights. Some of the definitions and report formats are contradictory. The end of year “critical incident” reports on cases solved six months earlier are time-consuming, by statute anonymous to protect victims, and often take time away from prevention activities. They are of little use, looking backward. The state reporting laws should be reviewed and streamlined.

The Vermont Department of Education addressed one problem of filling out dozens of reports on paper by putting almost half of the data requests in electronic formats. The Department now sends most of its communications, notices and information on the required reports by email. At least ten percent of the respondents from schools and central offices applauded that change, and complimented the state agency staff.

Many others complained about the cumulative burden of so many reports and asked for relief. Special education directors said as much as forty to fifty percent of their time was devoted to filling out reports, compliance documents, and special education audits.

Some complained about the timing of report requests during certain times of heavy workload, such as the December-January school budget season or the October testing (NECAP) weeks each year. A few felt that reports were sometimes a surprise and that not enough time was allowed for responding to the request. However, a review of the Vermont DOE website revealed a published annual calendar of major required reports,

and usually four to six weeks allowed to fill out the report. It became clear that some educators did not know about the online calendar.

VI. What Vermont Has Done

The issue of so many state reports required from local schools has come up before. In 1989 a Denver, Colorado group identified 140 different Vermont DOE data collection instruments and forms. The report concluded that “Collection of data, especially financial, is one of the department’s most important roles” and “vital for funding of state aid, special education and vocational education.”

The 1989 report found that each of four divisions maintained its own data bank with no access to the others. “There is currently a duplication of questions being asked on many of the forms.” The consultant asked, “What information can the Department stop collecting?” The report recommended a calendar of data collection dates and a manual on data collection for superintendents. In 1996, the Vermont Joint Fiscal Office made suggestions that further streamlined data collections.

The Vermont Department of Education in response took these positive actions:

1. Although reports on annual vision, blood pressure and hearing tests are still required to be sent to the state, the Commissioner has recommended those and other reports to the state be eliminated (See H. 879 The Repeal of Unnecessary, Duplicative, and Burdensome Reports, et al.).
2. Other separate data requests were consolidated into student census formats.
3. A calendar of major reports and due dates was published, and now can be found on the Department of Education website.
4. Forty of the reports were put into electronic format so that the reports can be sent via discs or electronically, which was not yet available in 1989.
5. Half of the 60 Supervisory Districts in 2004 voluntarily joined a state Education Data Consortium (which supervises an Educational Data Warehouse) that allows local schools to compile data for reports, access their own data, and compare data trends over time.

Within the Vermont Department of Education more than twenty staff positions have been reclassified as data managers, analysts, and computer system specialists, hired and trained in modern data collection systems. The survey of 268 Vermont educators and local data coordinators showed some awareness of progress and faster communications over the past five years.

What else has the Vermont DOE done to modernize the collection and flow of information and to help local schools? Both the state legislature and US Department of Education between 1999 and 2007 offered some constructive help.

1. The Vermont Department of Education used a \$396,000 state budget allocation in 1999 to purchase Oracle licenses and servers so that nine major reports might become web-based, the Fall and Spring Student Census, the Preliminary and Approved Budget Data Collection, the Consolidated Federal Program Online Grant Application, Child Nutrition and Medicaid Reimbursements, Teacher Staff and Salary Study, and VT Governance System Reports.
2. When half of the Supervisory Districts expressed interest in an electronic Education Data Warehouse (EDW), the state agreed to assume 60% of the costs with what became the Vermont Data Consortium (VDC). Each member district enjoys secure access to its own data, used for student lists, climate survey reports, local assessments and state reporting. With properly trained local or supervisory district data coordinators, hundreds of hours are saved each year.
3. The Vermont Department of Education pursued and won a federal grant in Fiscal Year 04 that produced a “Best Practices” guide entitled *Collecting and Reporting Quality Data* for Vermont school data collection. The pamphlet describes how to use technology and spread sheets to shorten the time needed to comply with reporting requirements. It suggests how to make software decisions and provides criteria and questions to speed up the flow of reports. Some but not all local data coordinators have used the guide and completed training offered by the state.
4. The Vermont Department of Education in FY07 won a federal grant (from USOE and NCES) to develop report templates (formats and tables) that will display statistical and achievement data in vivid and useful graphic terms. This breakthrough will expand the usefulness of the Education Data Warehouse and assist the local schools get reports. Several respondents asked for more templates. One Supervisory District developed a set of formative assessment tools (VCAT) that allows looking at pupil achievement more often. This is useful, but does not substitute for the federally required “summative” assessments compiled through VDC and the data warehouse.

Recently the Vermont legislature examined 41 state agency reports to the legislature required each year (a few of them biennial) from the University, the Vermont state colleges, and the Department of Education. The Senate Education Committee expressed the intention of deleting 12 and retaining 12 others required from the Vermont Department of Education, keeping several on Special Education and No Child Left Behind costs. This is a useful pruning of the regulatory report-requiring tree, but Vermont statutes still require state data collection from local schools. Only the state agency staff will feel some immediate relief. Some good intentions go half way. An Act 60 law on state grants was repealed in 1999 except for the annual report requirement which continued on until 2008. It may make sense to “sunset” all state and local report requirements with a specific termination date, or review them every five years to see who uses them.

VII. What Other States Have Done

Every state in the nation is looking closely at education data and how best to collect, store, access and use the data to make policy or improved educational practice at the school and classroom level. In most cases, the demands for data have far outstripped state capacities.

Maryland in the late 1990's launched a Web-based interactive process linked to state standards and resources for improving instructional practice at the school building level. Student data were displayed in graphic formats by county, city and school level.

Several Midwestern states built new capacities: the Illinois School Improvement Web site, Wisconsin's Information Network for Successful Schools (WINNS), and the Minnesota School District Information Analysis in 2002, joint efforts with the federally-funded North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL)

Standard and Poor's School Evaluation Services (SES) helped Michigan and Pennsylvania with school-level data disaggregation, both on costs and student performance. The Broad Foundation and U.S. Department of Education funded data analysis tools for states under the School Information Partnership. The tools (WWW.Schoolresults.org) have helped several states since 2003.

The federal government has taken steps to create the Education Data Exchange Network (EDEN) to pursue common standards and policies for state data collection and information management. To assist with No Child Left Behind, the U.S. Department of Education helped 24 states form a consortium to explore the potential of state-wide e-learning and decision-support platforms, with access to lesson plans and test items and other ways to match up to state learning standards. The National Center for Educational Statistics twice a year brings together data-system managers from all fifty states and produces data standards, handbooks and guidance for high quality state reports.

Vermont has taken aggressive action to convert more than 40 required state reports to an electronic format and to replace mailed instructions with email assistance and two-way conversations. Vermont DOE staff have prioritized another 20 reports for electronic reporting, but will need state funds and staff to convert them to web formats. The Department sends an informational email each week to supervisory districts and school administrators, including deadlines and report forms now available and when due.

Those studying state education information systems acknowledge the fact that many local educators do not understand the data technologies, although they respond readily with complaints about the burden. Simultaneously, state education agencies need to employ a few local administrators who understand the burdens and solutions. Otherwise, it is very difficult to mobilize a constituency for upgrading state and local data collection capacities.

“Local control” over software decisions can cause costly information transfer problems. Other states faced similar problems of discrete or separate databases that were incompatible with other data collection systems. These resulted in “gross inefficiencies, redundant data entry, higher support costs, and inability to access pertinent data for decision-making”, according to a 2004 article in the *Policy Review* by Robert M. Palaich and others for the North Central Regional Lab.

Many states wrestle with multiple IT platforms, programming languages, and idiosyncratic codes and tags. Furthermore, many state data systems have been organized by “events”, such as enrollment dates, budget approvals and tax determination deadlines. The emerging view is that states should know over many years how much learning actually takes place, how much of educational “value” has been acquired by each child, some of whom move from one school to another or from one district to another (some more than once). The state educational data challenge moves from looking at “snapshots” to multiyear videos or learning portfolios of “value added” growth. That describes the frontier of state education information systems and requires a change of state and local mind-sets.

Tennessee has attracted much attention for its “Value Added Assessments” that follow each child. The Midwestern states assign codes and numbers to each student, while preserving privacy, a serious issue. Vermont was one of the first states to assign a unique identification number to each child. Several state agencies explored use of Surveys of Enacted Curriculum (SEC) with desk-top computer access to data. Policy priorities and state budgets have held back many states from developing and implementing these new systems.

Maine recently appropriated \$1 million for a new information system that collects school district revenue, budget, and expenditures in ways that help the locals but also informs the state, while reducing data collection needs.

California has begun a project that assesses local bottlenecks in data reporting and trains local school system staffs on how to eliminate the most time-consuming transfers of data.

The policy implications from this review of other states suggest:

1. It is important for each state to prioritize what to study and measure.
2. School and student performance have become more important than traditional cost accounting and compliance reports.
3. States must focus on how to manage and integrate disparate data sources.
4. Data must be reported in timely and useful ways.
5. Both the state and local levels need to build stronger technical and human capacities to use data, including staff training.

The North Central Regional Laboratory suggested that each state appoint a state commission on educational data collection including state agency and field representatives, an annual state work plan, and periodically report to the governor and legislature on accomplishments and unmet needs. Vermont might also add preschool and higher education representatives as well, because there is a growing support for thinking of educational policy budgets and outcomes measures not just as K- 12 but as Pre-School through 20 (graduate school). A few states such as Florida and Oregon are looking not just at K-12 but at P-20 data policies that unify rather than perpetuate the segmentation and fragmentation of each level of education.

What becomes clear is that:

1. The federal initiatives in education especially NCLB and IDEA have dramatically expanded data collection burdens, adding greatly to costs and student information requirements, with a greater emphasis and display of instructional productivity outcome measures.
2. States and local schools have been overwhelmed with the new data collection and management issues.
3. Great efforts and budget investments are needed to translate the data into useful feedback formats for educational leaders and school principals and teachers.
4. There are no quick fixes, and the challenges of looking at education from ages three to twenty five are complicated and require multi-year work plans.
5. Vermont has taken the first steps towards electronic reporting systems but the DOE must have state budget support to take the next steps.
6. Vermont is not alone, and can benefit from collaboration with other states, the New England region and federal agencies, as it has on sharing costs of the NECAP assessment system.

VIII. Remedies

The respondents to the Vermont electronic survey offered many suggestions of which these are constructive and appropriate:

1. Centralize the DOE data collection function for all surveys and reports, to eliminate duplicate questions. Put the education data formats and collection responsibilities under one state information officer.
2. Tell the local schools and superintendents twice a year that there is already a published (online) calendar of annual surveys and required local school reports, with dates sent and deadline, usually four six weeks later, and avoiding most reports during budget or NECAP months. Continue the weekly email, and add a monthly newsletter to the board members (who need occasional updates too).
3. Consolidate reports which now collect overlapping, redundant data, or data mostly constant from year to year, especially on teachers and staff. The data on teachers and on student incidents have most often been collected in different formats, not all of them consistent or useful.
4. Require all schools and supervisory districts to have a standardized financial management system, and student information system (including student attendance and special education data). A state committee including local school officials should review and select the best software systems for all of Vermont of each, to be revisited at five year intervals.
5. Provide periodic training for local school staff assigned the responsibilities of submitting reports and data, supervised by a State Data Collection Coordinator (see the Vermont Best Practices Guide for details).
6. Provide useful state feedback on at least ten of the state reports required each year. Including comparisons, trend lines, analyses of strengths and weaknesses.
7. Analyze NECAP achievement test results, state and local data trends over a period of several years, pointing out strengths and specific weaknesses, related to curriculum standards. Each school, and the general public, needs to know about improvements or deficiencies, for example, in mathematics scores over time. Other reports could point out the frontiers of school improvement.
8. The Senate and Governor should eliminate or consolidate those specific reports identified in the House bill, and a few more each year.
9. Expand the use of electronic technology to replace the old written, mailed reports.
10. Move in a series of steps towards promoting the Vermont Education Data Warehouse to add another 25 or more of the required federal and state reports to

electronic formats.

IX. Recommendations for action

1. The Vermont Legislature and Governor should consider these actions:

A. Enact H.879 which would repeal these required Vermont state reports:

- 1) The state board of education biennial report of activities
- 2) The lists of school and community wellness programs
- 3) Local alcohol and drug abuse reports
- 4) Reports to the alcohol and drug abuse council about local education
- 5) Results of hearing and vision tests
- 6) Detailed status reports on educational support services teams
- 7) The status report on technical education pilot projects
- 8) Report on initial implementation of regional high school choice
- 9) Report on special education cost containment initiatives
- 10) Certain required local reports to the community on health, social well-being, early reading programs, early care programs, family support, regional job opportunities and graduates, student attendance and absences, student discipline data (but keeping progress reports on an action plan), technical education options, and cost-effectiveness comparisons
- 11) and allow CPAs to include Special Education audits in their scope of work and to streamline reporting and claims submissions

B. Consider a process for an annual evaluation update by establishing a Vermont Education Reports Council including four Department of Education report managers and four supervisory districts or local district staff to recommend once a year on those reports or data files that can be consolidated, simplified or eliminated, and also to offer advice regarding the Vermont Data Consortium and other ways to use technology to reduce the burdens of federal and state reporting, with a chair designated by the commissioner. The IT Director of the Vermont Department of Education will be a key resource in this process.

C. Require and fund the DOE to prepare an analysis of tasks and costs to convert another 25-30 reports to a web format over the next two years.

- D. Enroll all supervisory districts in the Vermont Data Consortium and Education Data Warehouse which requires \$400,000 and three additional positions to provide the staff capacity to manage the web-based reports.

2. Require the DOE to:

- A. Provide training to the state education data coordinators in each supervisory district or school reporting unit on using the Educational Data Warehouse, estimated at .5 FTE staffing of \$30,000 a year.
- B. To engage in an internal analysis of alignment of reports with statutes, and the elimination of redundancies, followed by a Business Process Reengineering exercise to design a better work- flow for all communications within the state education agency, especially towards reducing the data required by federal and state statutes and sharing results with local school officials.
- C. To prepare a long range multi-year plan for the re-classification of all state education agency staff, including the necessary training to become familiar with modern technology and data driven decision methodologies
- D. To continue the weekly electronic communications with schools, to announce the report calendar twice a year (September and January), and to prepare periodic trend analyses and comparisons of costs and program accomplishments to guide school decision-makers

3. Supervisory Districts

- A. To join and support the Vermont Data Consortium and the designation and training of technically qualified report data coordinators
- B. To move in a series of steps to state specifications, and eventually a single state and local student information system and financial management system, aligned with state and federal requirements to save time and money on required data transfers

4. Local School Districts

- A. Look at the DOE website twice a year to see the calendar and assign staff time four weeks in advance of the report due date
- B. Agree to purchase software and train staff in modern technology and information transfer methodologies

5. The U.S. Congress and Secretary of Education should:

- A. Simplify and streamline the endless flow of required reports to the U.S. Department of Education in the next reauthorizations of No Child Left Behind and IDEA.
- B. Consider requiring biennial rather than annual achievement tests in grades 3-8
- C. Streamline and simplify the IDEA student reporting requirements
- D. Fund fully the NCLB and IDEA programs that now require state funding
- E. Re-establish a Title to Strengthen State Educational Agencies as was done 1965-80 under the Elementary and Secondary Education Acts, especially to finance electronic data collection, reporting and analysis to improve instruction

Copies of this report should go to the two United States Senators and Congressman along with the endorsement and comments from local and state leaders including legislators.

X. Appendices

Vermont DOE Survey [Exit this survey >>](#)

1. Vermont Department of Education Communication and Reporting Survey

Per the requirements of Act 82, Section 14, the Vermont Department of Education has engaged the services of the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) to survey school and school district administrators regarding efforts to continue improving the flow of useful information between schools/districts and the Department. Your responses to the following brief survey will be greatly appreciated. The Vermont Department of Education and NESDEC thank you in advance for helping us to help you.

Responses will be accepted until 12:00 noon on March 10, 2008.

The NESDEC Team: Joseph Cronin,Ed.D.; John R. Sullivan,Jr.,Ed.D.; Donald Kennedy,Ed.D.; Arthur L. Bettencourt,Ed.D.

1. From the list below, please choose the response that most closely describes your position in the school district.

- ☐ From the list below, please choose the response that most closely describes your position in the school district. Superintendent
- ☐ Other Central Office Administrator
- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Other Building Administrator

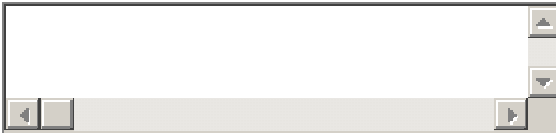
2. Supervisory Union or Supervisory District Student Enrollment (Central Office Respondents Only):

- ☐ Supervisory Union or Supervisory District Student Enrollment (Central Office Respondents Only): Less than 1000
- ☐ 1001-2000
- ☐ Greater than 2000

3. Enrollment in Your School (Building Administrator Respondents Only):

- ☐ Enrollment in Your School (Building Administrator Respondents Only): Less than 100
- ☐ 101-400
- ☐ 401-800
- ☐ Greater than 800

4. The Vermont Department of Education is concerned about the burdens placed upon local administrators and support staff when supplying information required by federal and state laws and regulations. In your opinion, what are the most serious issues you encounter or observe as you and your school/district strive to meet the mandated reporting of information and/or data to the Vermont Department of Education?



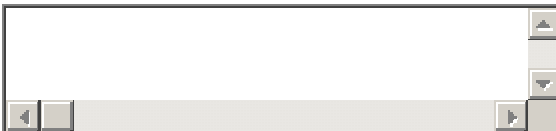
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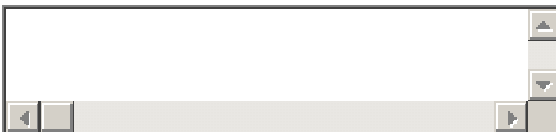
2. Vermont DOE Survey: Page 2

5. Which state or federally required reports appear to create the greatest burdens for you and your staff? If possible, please be specific by identifying a particular report(s) or body of information/data.



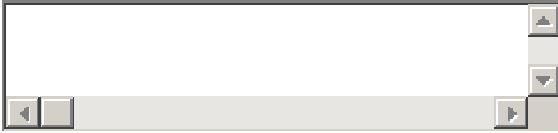
Which state or federally required reports appear to create the greatest burdens for you and your staff? If possible, please be specific by identifying a particular report(s) or body of information/data.

6. What remedies or solutions would you propose to address the reporting issues you have previously identified in items #4 and #5?



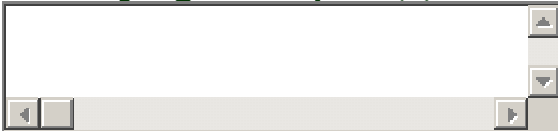
What remedies or solutions would you propose to address the reporting issues you have previously identified in items #4 and #5?

7. In your opinion, which of the required DOE data reports are most valuable in supporting your work in Vermont schools?



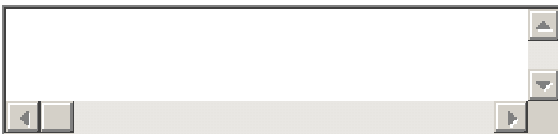
In your opinion, which of the required DOE data reports are most valuable in supporting your work in Vermont schools?

8. In your opinion, are there state or legislatively mandated reports that no longer serve a useful purpose and, therefore, should be considered for elimination? Please be specific by identifying the report(s).



In your opinion, are there state or legislatively mandated reports that no longer serve a useful purpose and, therefore, should be considered for elimination? Please be specific by identifying the report(s).

9. Please feel free to add additional comments you think might be helpful as the Vermont Department of Education reviews issues related to reporting requirements for schools and school districts.



Please feel free to add additional comments you think might be helpful as the Vermont Department of Education issues related to reporting requirements for schools and school districts.

<< Prev

Done >>

A. Survey Results, with 268 Vermont respondents by March 21, 2008

Questions 1-3 asked about the role of the respondent, size of school and other data to ensure that both small and larger schools, school districts and supervisory districts or unions responded.

1. The respondents included 38 superintendents, 70 other central office staff, 149 principals and eleven others with reporting responsibilities.
2. Of the Supervisory Unions or Districts, 26% were from less than 1000 pupils, 47% from 1000-2000, and 26% from greater than 2000 pupils.
3. From school respondents, 18% were from schools with fewer than 100 pupils, 59% from 101-400, 14% from 401-800, and 8.6% from larger schools.
4. What are the burdens of state and federal laws and reports. Which are the most serious issues? 233 Vermonters responded:
 - 45 Cited the amount of time consumed filling out, transmitting reports
 - 31 Duplication, redundancy of data requests
 - 27 Number of data requests have increased dramatically
 - 15 Not enough time to complete and check reports
 - 12 Time of year (reports due during budget or NECAP season)
 - 12 No state feedback or analysis on reports submitted
 - 6 Lack of standard Student Information Systems/data bases
 - 7 No calendar of state surveys (actually on the Web)
 - 5 Computers incompatible, e.g. with Mac computers
 - 4 Not enough templates for state report displays
 - 3 The state census reports are not user friendly
 - 3 Reports sent to schools, where instead Supervisory Districts could complete the report.

Other comments: lack of staff, training, old technology, too much reporting of information about the last year or two.

- 4 Responded positively, saying that the VT DOE data collection “system is working”.

Comments included “DOE has been short-staffed.” “DOE staff are helpful to a new administrator.” “Use of discs, email has been very helpful.”

5. Which state and federal reports constitute the greatest burden? 152 responses:
 - 32 The School Census, Fall and Spring
 - 32 The many Special Ed reports, time sheets, audits
 - 21 CIRS Critical Incidents report
 - 17 Highly Qualified Teacher report (may duplicate licensure data)
 - 14 STAT Report (finance)

- 11 Teacher Census Reports
- 10 Safe and Healthy school Reports
- 4 Medicaid Reimbursement (SpEd)

Fifteen respondents mentioned other individual specific reports. The federal OCR report was described as unnecessarily complex and convoluted.

Two respondents said there were no serious burdens.

6. What are the Remedies or Solutions? 146 responses:

13 Require schools to have the same compatible software (student information, and financial management) systems. Adopt for all schools one state- wide data system and central data warehouse.

7 Streamline, consolidate, simplify the multiple reports

7 Special education reports should be by school, not by student.
(Consider a bloc grant for special education.)

3 More state training for online and new administrators on data, timelines, use of technology regulations

3 suggest rewriting the report instructions that over time become long and cumbersome.

2 say the use of software by the state has gradually improved data collection efforts.

2 respondents each recommend more “electronic” reporting, an annual report calendar, more time for completing reports, and closer coordination between departments. Using Supervisory Districts as the reporting entity (not the school).

One respondent each recommended:

Collect some information every third year

Flexible formats

Pay the costs of report collection

Only one annual school budget survey, not two

Define Highly Qualified Teacher

Extra SOE staffing during final week of reporting

Require all reports in the summer

Update Handbook II (US accounting guidelines)

Eliminate grade level splits in STAT report
Consolidate all CFP data elements or none
Support the MAC users
Inform legislators of the real costs of new and changing laws
Keep up the helpful DOE field email memoranda that comment on reports due, deadlines, and whom to contact.

7. Which are the most valuable reports? 138 responses:

- 25 NECAP and Assessment Data from “Measured Progress”
- 19 Special Education, Expenses, Service Plans
- 13 Student census, demography trends, child count, especially when accessible in the data warehouse
- 3 Financial reports
- 5 The ADM reports

Fifteen (7 %) said they could think of none.

Eleven other reports received one mention. One respondent said “Restore the 2006 graphing program for NECAP test results.”

A superintendent called for a Readers Digest Condensed Version of required reports to share critical information with the school board.

8. Which No Longer Serve Any Purpose or Value? 100 responses:

15 Critical Incident Reports (CIRs and SWIS definitions do NOT match). Irrelevant for early grades. Rarely useful. Change the Drug Free School law.

- 4 School Quality Standards
- 3 Special Ed time sheets. SpEd Audits. SpEd Spending reports “time to change the law”
- 3 Safe and Healthy Schools
- 3 ESS Annual Report

Others mentioned Educator Census, HQT (duplicated licensure report) Kindergarten readiness report (2).

One said “keep the ADM, eliminate the others”

15 could not identify any report without looking at the entire list

9. Other Comments. 85 responses:

12 said that DOE staff are is very helpful. School safety report “now easier”. “Overall DOE doing good work”. One recommended “a standing ovation”.

4 suggested “Tell the legislature how much time is taken up by reports. Lobby for consolidation!” “We are drowning in paperwork!”

Others suggested:

3 Additional staff for DOE and VT Department of Finance
3 Adopt the Data Warehouse model to extract usable information
2 Put ALL reports online
More information on data trends
Limit data collection to information we can use, NECAP
Act 82 NOT a good idea until SpEd is fully funded
More social services to needy families, all children ready to learn

“Loosen the reins. Why micromanage all schools?”
Keep in mind NEASC (accreditation agency) also requires data reports
NECAP Why assess in October, but no report until February?
Tell Federal Government too much reporting to OCR required

Upgrade the technology for all educational agencies and levels

5 said “Thank you for asking.”

B. Partial List of Reports mentioned in the electronic NESDEC Survey of local school reports

Access to ELL (English Language Learners)
ADM (Daily Membership)

Annual School Report
Annual Safety Report
Child Count
Civil Rights Report
Consolidated Federal Programs (CFP), Titles I through V (Demographic, EdFlex waivers
CIRS-Critical Incident Report Software)
Comparative Data for School Effectiveness
Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), part of NECAP
Dropout and High School Completion Report
Drug Free Schools
Educator Census Report
ESS Annual Report
HQT Highly Qualified Teacher
Kindergarten Readiness Report

Portfolio Assistant of Alternative Grade Expectations, PAAGE (reading, writing,
mathematics and science)

Summary of the Annual Statistical Report on Schools SASR
Special Education Expense Report, SEERS
School Improvement Grant, SIG
Small Schools Support Grant
Special Education SpEd Services Plan Expense Report Quarterly Audits Due
Process
Safe and Healthy Schools Report
State Placed Students SPS
School Quality Standards SQS
STAT data submission
Student Monitoring Progress Report
Youth Risk Behavior Survey YRBS



**VERMONT DOE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS PROJECT
FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS
March 2008**

1. Many complain about redundancy in the Vermont Department of Education reports. Can you cite three or four examples?

2. Half of the Supervisory Districts are in the Vermont Data Consortium. How well is it working? Does it save time in transferring data? What would you recommend as the next steps?

3. The legislature is willing to cut out or consolidate some required reports. Which ones would you recommend?

4. What initiatives and/or investments would you recommend to assist in the process of translating data collected by the Vermont DOE into useful feedback for educators in the schools?

5. What ongoing, systematic way(s) would you recommend for monitoring the burden of data collection/reporting, and for examining strategies for streamlining the process to make the data accessible to and useful for educators in the schools?

XI. Related Documents

Career Wise and System Wide Solutions, “A Report on the Vermont School Governance Public Engagement Process of 2006-07” June, 2007

Cate, Richard “The Governance of Education in Vermont-1776-2006”, May, 2006

Davis, Rep. Susan et.al, letter to Richard Cate January 29, 2007

Melman, Brian “Educational Governance in the United States: A 2007 Report” July, 2007

Palaich, Robert et al. “State Education Data Systems that Increase Learning and Improve Accountability”, North Central Regional Lab, June 2004, Issue 16, available on the Web at NCREL.org/policy/pubs/pdfs/pivol16

Vermont Business Roundtable and Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce, Nicolas Rockler and Thomas Kavet, “Vermont State Public Education Expenditure Overview and Analysis Phase I”, September, 2006

Vermont Department of Education “Laws and Regulations: Legislative Reports in 2007 Report on Act 82. Section 19: An Act Relating to Education Quality and Cost Control Control” (Added 12/3/07)

Vermont NEA, Joel Cook memo to Richard Cate “Governance recommendations pursuant to Act 82, Section 19”: November 15, 2007

Vermont School Boards Association, John Nelson letter to Richard Cate “re Act 82”, November 7, 2007

Vermont Superintendents Association, Mary Moran letter to Richard Cate “re Act 82, Section 19” November 12, 2007